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SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN BLOC TELLS HDAC THEY ARE THE
ORIGINAL OPPOSITION

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On May 28, Aoun bloc member Ibrahim Kenaan told visiting members of the House Democracy Assistance Commission that the Aoun bloc was the original opposition; this status derives from the bloc having always opposed any government formed via elections that took place under the old Syrian-dictated electoral law. As the system is now, Kenaan said, it is not democratic. The Aoun bloc only opposes that which is not democratic. Kenaan said that a coalition comprising Hariri, Jumblatt and Hizballah originally formed the government. They had no national vision, only a marriage of interests, and therefore the government fell apart over time, due to calls for an international tribunal and for the disarmament of Hizballah. End Summary.

RELATIONSHIP WITH HIZBALLAH CAME
FROM DESIRE FOR DEMOCRACY

2. (SBU) In a 5/28 meeting at the home of Aoun bloc MP Ibrahim Kenaan, Kenaan and fellow Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) members Ghassan Moukhaiber, Walid Khoury and Alain Aoun explained how the bloc originated, and its alignment with Hizballah, to the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), Embassy Econoffs, and Congressional staff aides. Kenaan first expressed his gratitude to the Embassy for organizing the Parliamentarians, recent visit to the U.S. He said they learned much from the exposure to democracy and debate. In response to questions from Chairman Price regarding the bloc's role in Parliament, Kenaan said the Aoun bloc was always for a democracy in which all Lebanese were represented and had real voices. Although they opposed the present electoral law adopted in 2000, they participated and emerged as the group in opposition to the March 14 group parliamentary majority. They considered themselves the bloc that does not owe anything to Saad Hariri or anyone else. After the summer 2005 parliamentary elections, a coalition was formed by Mustaqbal leader Saad Hariri, PSP and Druse leader Walid Jumblatt, Amal, and Hizballah. This coalition then came to agreements on how to distribute Cabinet seats, while the Aoun-led FPM bloc became the opposition. With the later Cabinet adoption of international resolutions, which Hizballah and Amal opposed, the coalition collapsed.

BAD PR ALIGNS THEM TO HIZBALLAH

13. (SBU) Kenaan stressed that the Aoun bloc is not beholden to anyone else, s views and opposes any group that does not advocate re-shaping the political system. He pointed out that they have "lots of differences with Hizballah," and gave as an example their support for the LAF in the current situation at the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp. By contrast, Hizballah has been against the LAF entering the Palestinian refugee camp in order to capture terrorist extremists. Kenaan mentioned other issues such as independence and national sovereignty, in which, he said, the FPM takes stances distinct from those of Hizballah.

14. (SBU) Aoun supporter Ghassan Moukhaiber added that being in a group with those who are allies of Syria does not mean that the bloc itself is an ally of Syria. He also said he is aware that some say members of the Aoun bloc are "nice guys" but have been caught up and are being used by Hizballah. While being a part of the opposition, the FPM still shares some policies with the March 14 parliamentary majority, such as the establishment of the tribunal, support for the LAF, and non-interference by Syria in Lebanon's internal affairs. Kenaan repeatedly told the HDAC delegation that General Aoun is anti-Syria and wants to bring Lebanon to a situation in which the country does not look to outsiders for support. He accepted HDAC Chairman Price, s comment that an alliance with Hizballah and Amal & just wasn, t right8 and said that in the beginning, Hizballah hid from the FPM the Hizballah agenda on its own arms.

DIVISION OF CHRISTIANS

15. (SBU) The political split among Lebanon's Christians came about, according to Ghassan Moukhaiber, because of a "breakdown of confidence and the high level of competition

BEIRUT 00000783 002 OF 002

among the political groups.8 There are some groups, he said, that are happy to see Aoun aligned with Hizballah because this implies less political competition for them. Walid Khoury offered that the Aoun bloc was rejected by the Hariri and Jumblatt coalition without reason. Kenaan added that former PM Hariri was in power with Syria, s support. The Cedar revolution actually started well before Rafiq Hariri's February 2005 assassination. The real beginning of the end for the Syrians in Lebanon occurred on October 13, 1990, when Syria invaded the last part of Lebanon. Initial opposition to the Syrians at that time centered on the Aounists, who were only later joined by Hariri and Jumblatt. This anti-Syrian consensus broke down when the majority agreed to elections in 2005 on the basis of the Syrian-dictated 2000 electoral law. We in the Aoun bloc, he said, wonder how one can build a country without a minimal common understanding among the people, and without a national unity government. Syria manipulated us by dividing our communities, he claimed.

REQUEST FOR CRITICAL WEAPONS FOR LAF

16. (C) Moukhaiber said he went recently to see LAF Commander General Sleiman, who told him that he does not have what he needs to attack Fatah al-Islam extremists in the Nahr el-Barad refugee camp. Sleiman told Moukhaiber that he needs tank rounds, and helicopters with rockets or missiles. Moukhaiber asked if supplying such weaponry is a political issue for the U.S.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL PARLIAMENT

17. (SBU) Parliament was dysfunctional from the start, according to Moukhaiber, and the decision making process is flawed, leading to the Parliament breaking up into groups. As Parliament met so infrequently over the years, the executive branch now makes all the decisions. Fundamental

reforms for Parliament need to be enacted. There has been no real dialogue about this, Moukhaiber claimed, and for that reason he reiterates his calls for political reform.

18. (U) The House Democracy Assistance Commission has not cleared this message.

FELTMAN